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ABSTRACT

Women now represent 45% of the work force, and 74% of all 25- to 54-year-old women now work. Despite these statistics, women are still clustered in 20 of 400 occupational categories, and 70% of female secondary vocational students are preparing for low-wage jobs. These statistics, coupled with the findings of research on self-esteem and identity formation, mandates included in the 1990 Carl Perkins Act, and growing recognition of the fact that gender equity is good business, have motivated renewed emphasis on the creation of an environment in which individuals consider career options and make career choices based on their abilities rather than on stereotypes and expectations. A new set of issues accompanies the renewed interest in gender equity. Included among these issues are attitudes and stereotypes, sexual harassment, equity and males, learning and communication styles, and accountability. The most important issue, however, remains that of how gender equity can be achieved. (An annotated bibliography of 15 print resources for vocational educators interested in accelerating gender equity in education and in work is provided along with the names and addresses of four resource organizations concerned with issues related to gender equity in vocational education.) (MN)

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Trends and Issues Alerts

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS

by Sandra Kerka 1993

Gender Equity in Vocational Education

Women represent 45% of the work force, and 74% of 25- to 54-year-old women work. However, women are clustered in 20 of 400 occupational categories (LeBreton and Loevy 1992); 70% of female secondary vocational students are preparing for low-wage jobs (Burge 1990); women constitute only 2% of skilled construction tradesworkers (LeBreton and Loevy 1992) and only 3.8% of apprentices since 1978 (Robbin et al. 1992); and 25% of college freshmen surveyed still believe a woman's place is in the home (*Vocational Equity* 1993). Thirty years after the Equal Pay Act and following several decades of varying attention to gender equity, have we come a long way?

A number of trends are motivating renewed emphasis on the creation of an environment in which individuals consider career options and make choices based on their abilities and not on stereotypes and expectations (Nash 1991):

Research on self-esteem and identity formation is spurring recognition that "the key to making a real difference in girls' lives is to get equity concepts and career and life planning strategies infused into core curriculum" at an early age (*Vocational Equity* 1993). Self-esteem is related to participation in math, science, and technology classes, which females tend to avoid, although they are preparation for many high-paying careers (Fear-Fenn and Kapostasy 1992).

The 1990 Carl Perkins Act mandates 7% of the basic state grant for single parent/displaced homemaker programs/services and 3% for the promotion of sex equity. However, loopholes in the final regulations may weaken these mandates (Coyle-Williams and Maddy-Bernstein 1992) and the sex equity effects of the 1984 Perkins Act remain largely unmeasured (Burge 1990).

Gender equity is good business. Because of demographic and workplace changes, such as increased numbers of women and diverse populations in the work force, shortages of skilled workers, emphasis on self-sufficiency in welfare reform, and progressive human resource management, businesses are recognizing that equitable treatment makes economic sense (LeBreton and Loevy 1992).

A new set of issues (as well as some enduring ones) accompanies renewed interest in gender equity:

Attitudes and Stereotypes. Legislation has focused on eliminating discrimination, but equally important barriers are persistent stereotypes and attitudes about appropriate career choices and sex roles. These barriers range from (1) internal, self-imposed limitations influenced by cultural messages girls receive to (2) family influence (a prime factor in vocational enrollment and career choice) to (3) attitudes of teachers, counselors, and fellow students to (4) hostile working environments. Females of color and those with disabilities face hurdles both because of their gender and their race or disability (Robbin et al. 1992).

Sexual Harassment. Harassment is reported by large numbers of women in school and the workplace; the stress of dealing with these situations makes persistence in nontraditional education or work very difficult. Although women in nontraditional programs are often trained to deal with hostility and harassment, "success or failure should be based on a woman's ability to do the work, not on her ability to cope" (LeBreton and Loevy 1992, p. 23).

Equity and Males. Males also face some attitudinal barriers to nontraditional occupations. However, a more important effect of inequity on males is the limitations placed on their family roles and other psychological and sociological costs of male sex role demands (Burge 1990; Nash 1991).

Learning and Communication Styles. Growing recognition of differences in cognitive style and interaction, both between men and women and among diverse cultural groups, is influencing redesign of curricula and teaching strategies to accommodate all styles (Wingate and Woolis 1992). In math, science, and technical courses, these changes can open doors to women and other "special" populations.

Accountability. Wingate and Woolis suggest that counselor, teacher, and program performance standards should include success with equitable recruitment and retention. Teacher and counselor training, more female role models, incentives for meeting equity goals, and sharing information about successful gender equity programs are ways to meet Perkins mandates.

The real question for today is not *why* equity but *how* (Bohnen et al. 1991). The following resources can help vocational educators accelerate gender equity in education and in work.

Print Resources

Baldwin, J., and Kielbaso, G., comps. ***Working Together: A Sex Equity Training Manual.*** East Lansing: Michigan Vocational Education Resource Center, 1990. (ED 326 613)

Nine learning modules on career stereotypes, gender stereotyping, media influence on sex roles, life skills, marketing and public relations, managing sexual harassment, adult reentry students, male role stereotypes, and comparable worth.

Beck, J. ***Step by Step. A Seven-Step Process for Increasing Enrollment of Women and Girls in Nontraditional Programs.*** Washington, DC: Wider Opportunities for Women, 1989. (ED 313 588)

Distills the Educational Equity Options Project into a recruitment process. Includes a sex equity awareness training module and resource bibliography.

Bitters, B. A., and Foxwell, S. ***Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education.*** Madison: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1990. (ED 325 673)

Seven strategies for an effective equity plan include promotional, staff development, affirmative guidance, curricular, classroom/school environment, administrative, and parent/community involvement.

Bohnen, E.; Booth, S.; and Klie, J. ***Bridges to Equity. Program Manual, Trainer's Guide, Participant's Workbook, Video.*** Toronto: Toronto Management Services Department, 1991.

Materials for an employment equity training program that combines classroom, shop, and work placement experiences.

Burge, P. L. "Vocational Education Gender-Equity Research Priorities for the 1990s." *Journal of Vocational Education Research* 15, no. 3 (1990): 1-19. (EJ 426 613)

Examines the impact of federal legislation and theory base for gender equity, including women in nontraditional occupations, preparation for family and work life, access to opportunities, and assessment of equity intervention programs.

Career, Education, & Training Associates. *Equity and Guidance Series.* Columbus: Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1993.

Includes "Equity Literature Review," "Funding Resource Directory," "Equity Resource Materials Guide," "Mentors' Guide to Improved Equity in School Decision Making," "Equity Evaluation—A Methods Guidebook" and guides to bias-free career planning for counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Changing Channels. Nontraditional Careers for Women. Linn, MO: Careers Unlimited, Linn Technical College, 1993.

Seven videotapes of satellite teleconferences on successful women in high tech nontraditional jobs: introduction to high tech careers, laser technology, drafting and computers, electronics and robotics, aviation and electronics, television and film industry, and astronauts.

Coyle-Williams, M., and Maddy-Bernstein, C. *1990 Perkins: Raising the Academic and Occupational Achievement of Women and Girls.* Urbana: Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program, University of Illinois, 1992. (ED 353 452)

Examines the role vocational education can play in helping women achieve better-paying jobs. Presents implications and limitations of the 1990 Perkins Act regarding sex equity programs and services.

Fear-Fenn, M., and Kapostasy, K. K. *Math + Science + Technology = Vocational Preparation for Girls.* Columbus: Center for Sex Equity, The Ohio State University, 1992. (ED 341 863)

Identifies factors influencing female underrepresentation in math, science, and technology courses. Provides strategies to address the issues of stereotypes, lack of self-confidence, attitudes, attributional style, lack of role models, and lack of incentives.

Goldsmith, D. J.; Lewis, L. H.; Lakes, R. D.; and Pritchard, A. M. *It's Our Shop, Too.* Hartford, CT: Vocational Equity Research, Training and Evaluation Center, 1991. (ED 348 545)

Presents results of interviews with nontraditional vocational students regarding reasons for enrollment, attitudes and treatment, and career concerns and with teachers regarding accommodating females in classrooms.

LeBreton, L. W., and Loevy, S. S. *Breaking New Ground: WORKSITE 2000.* Chicago: Chicago Women in Trades, 1992.

Proposes WORKSITE 2000, a vision of a construction industry with increased numbers of women workers who are treated equitably, with recommendations for model worksites, unions, apprenticeship programs, training programs, and government agencies.

Nash, M. A., ed. *Changing Roles of Men and Women: Educating for Equity in the Workplace.* Madison: Vocational Studies Center, University of Wisconsin, 1991.

Five units explore changing roles and life styles, gender bias and sex role stereotyping, equity in the workplace, individual and institutional opportunities to promote gender equity, and exploring selected gender equity topics and issues.

Robbin, D. J.; Flansburg, S.; and Eisenberg, S. *Gender Equity in Vocational Education. Digest.* Newton, MA: Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, 1992.

Includes "Gender Equity in Vocational Education," "Vocational Education in the School Reform Movement," and "Shaping a New Decade: Women in Construction."

Vocational Equity/Single Parent/Displaced Homemaker Update. Columbus: Center for Sex Equity, The Ohio State University, May 1993.

Reports on innovative programs to increase nontraditional enrollment in Ohio, comprehensive career/life planning for girls, and Gender/Ethnic Expectations and Student Achievement workshops.

Wingate, A., and Woolis, D. *Half of Our Future.* Middletown: Division of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education, Connecticut Department of Education, 1992. (ED 345 007)

The Nontraditional Opportunities Task Force concluded that, despite substantial effort, there is still not enough support for women who wish to enter nontraditional jobs. Recommendations for general systemic changes and changes by specific program area were made.

Resource Organizations

Center for Sex Equity, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (614/292-4353; 800/848-4815).

National Displaced Homemakers Network, 1625 K Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006 (202/467-6346). Recent publications include *A Guide to Nontraditional Occupations for Mid-Life and Older Women* (1993) and *Advocates' Guide to the Nontraditional Employment for Women Act* (1992).

9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, 614 Superior Avenue, Room 852, Cleveland, OH 44113 (216/566-9308).

Tradeswomen, Inc., P.O. Box 40664, San Francisco, CA 94140 (415/821-7334). Publishes *Trade Trax: A Newsletter for Women in Blue Collar Occupations* and *Tradeswomen: A Quarterly Magazine for Women in Blue Collar Occupations*.

Vocational Equity Research Evaluation and Training Center, 22 Maple Avenue, Hartford, CT 06114 (203/247-6090).

Wider Opportunities for Women/National Commission on Working Women, 1325 G Street, NW, Lower Level, Washington, DC 20005-3104 (202/638-3143).

Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02160 (800/225-3088; 617/969-7100).

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